T/SOR/50/1/5/5

Les and Ned

1] I am aware that you two are sick of being asked about the past. However, you have to accept that for some people, including the likes of me, you are part and parcel of a direct link into a great socialist tradition. It is important that work is continued in our home area, not only for the sake of our own radical history but also because it has a bearing on the wider socialist movement. I'm always struck when I meet people from other cultures when these similar sorts of problems arise that they have faced, these issues that socialists are always facing in one form or another eg. whether to work within parliament or stay outside, careerism infiltration, reformism, sectarianism,, united fronts or not, etc. etc. We can get a better understanding of this wider movement by examining our own times and the personalities and movements therein.

2] We also know that these days the knives of the revisionists are out. As a rule of thumb we take Red Clydeside to have existed for a period of about eight years, say from 1914 to 1922 (I can't quite remember), and that the term the 'Red Clydesiders' can only really apply to folk who were involved directly at that time. It is important that we don't allow the establishment to give a revised version of the socialist tradition. Nor do we let the academics highjack radical history; even well-intentioned academics will create their own concepts and impose their own conditions. It is surprising how easy some contemporary critics find it to deny the existence of Red Clydeside. 0bviously this is to fo with the education system that is stuck down our throats. It isn't just young people who know absolutely nothing of their own history. None of us do, it makes it too easy to tell us all lies.

3] It is maybe a worthwhile thing to consider that this matter, the existence or non-existence, the importance or unimportance, of Red Clydeside, is to some extent a red herring, because it takes us away from the actual tradition itself. It is much more crucial surely that we get a proper line on that tradition, and that we are able to seek out intellectual continuity where it exists, as for example through 18th century figures such as the Calton weavers, and Alexander Wilson the poet and great ornithologist, the Friends of the People, through another weaver, James Wilson, executed at 63 years of age for High Treason, and the other men around the Scottish Insurrection, such as Robert 0wen, through the Chartists and the Temperance movement, radical preachers like Chalmers and the disruption of the Church of Scotland, and then the stonemason Hugh Miller, John Murdoch of the Highland League, the stonebreaker Willie Nairn, these men of the 19th century[1] who had a direct and personal influence, as Les and Hughie stated in *All for the Cause*, "the historical line that stretches from Willie Nairn to Maclean and then on to Guy Aldred and Harry McShane." and includes many others, before and after.

4] I think the international side is important as well as interesting. We have the connections from the Second and Third International, Kropotkin, Peter Petroff as a close friend and comrade of John Maclean, how Maclean's reputation extended widely, given that he never left these islands. 0f course he was invited to Russia, especially later, to recover his health. Jim Young also believes that Maclean's reputation could have endured even if he had died before the 1st World War, and not been subject to these horrible attacks from the British State while iin prison for his opposition to the war. We also have the direct link through Connolly and Larkin ,Irish/USA connection.

5] Hypothetical questions are kind of daft but I wonder how matters would have gone on the formation of the CPGB if John Maclean had travelled with J.S.Clarke, Gallacher, Helen Crawfurd and the rest for the 1920 congress in Moscow, and presented the case properly for a Scottish Party, in opposition to Lenin and the rest. It has to be remembered that for a great many socialist people, one thing that the tradition displays right the way through is that self-determination for Scotland was an essential part of the agenda. Sometimes it is made to seem like John Maclean was the only one who ever thought along these lines, obviously just part of the propaganda that the CPGB put out about him?

6] Around the time of the formation of the CPGB a question that occurs is that if McShane was strongly involved with Maclean, James MacDougal, the Tramps Trust and so on, why did he go to the CPGB? As we know it was formed out of the BSP and in Scotland the BSP was lacking in revolutionary credibility even at that period in time.

Some could argue that for the likes of Willie Gallacher, because of the different pulls he had on him as a trades unionist, from such as the Clyde Workers Committee, etc. that the CPGB might seem a natural step, perhaps the most natural. But there again J.S.Clarke, like Gallacher, represented the CWC in Moscow but he opted out the CPGB and went to the ILP. Did Harry ever feel that he had gone in the wrong direction back when he joined the CP? Harry was always a bit of a sore thumb to the CPGB hierarchy so his thinking was always that bit different. In retrospect do YOU think that Harry went the wrong way?
NB but see Harry in pages 118-120

7] What about any of these questions to do with the socialist tradition going back into the 18th century, did any of it ever percolate down while you were all still in the CP?

8] I had to go through Hughie's letters in preparartion for this work, and there was a nice card from Raya Dunayevskaya, written following the tragic death of Hugh's youngest son. The connection to Raya Dunayevskaya and to the USA in general will be an interesting one for many people, this side of yourselves and Hugh, and crucially of course, Harry McShane who corresponded with her for 30 years. I remember Hughie mentioning that she stayed at his

house when she was in Britain. Dunayevskaya is an important figure, philosopher and writer, Chairwoman of *News and Letters Committees*, she was also Trotsky's secretary. Harry's correspondence with her began in earnest after the time you all left the Party: I don't know if it began earlier than that. Can you talk about this, and a side point, was Trotsky an important figure in your thinking at the time you left the Party, or indeed at any time after.

9] There is an interesting essay by Ronald L.Meek, *The Scottish Contribution to Marxist Sociology*, where he argues that "in the latter half of the 18th century the Scottish Historical School developed...Classical sociology[2] to a stage where it was becoming remarkably similar, at least in its broad outlines, to Marxist sociology." The four main figures were all professors: Adam Smith, Adam Ferguson, William Robertson and John Millar; they were impressed by Montesquieu's work ["man is born in society, and there he remains." The thorny subject of 'the democratic intellect' could rear its ugly head here...!

10] Meek also makes the comment on Adam Smith that "the more narrowly economic views of *The Wealth of Nations* have usually been emphasised at the expense of the general sociological system of which they were essentially a part." McShane was a great reader of Adam Smith and as we know this side of things was important to him. It definitely seems to tie in with the need to remember the humanist side of Marxist. Meek's article was published in pamphlet form in the mid 1950s[3], did any of you know him by any chance? At the period you all left the Party Harry McShane went back to studying Marx, especially the 1st volume of Capital,he wanted to look at things on the basic level again. Maybe to see where the Party had gone wrong, where the wrong turns had been taken by the socialist movement in general. 0r corrupted - is corrupted a better word, that the socialist movement had become corrupted? As I understand it Harry and yourselves felt that the morality had gone at the expense of the economic and there is also the comment from Raya Dunayevskaya along similar lines, that 'Marxism was nothing if it was not a theory of liberation", that Marxism surely has to be offering the working class people a different way of living their life, and so on.[4]

all of that was just to take us into the subject

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[1]Willie Nairn's contemporary and one of the co-founders of the Glasgow branch of the SDF was Moses McGibbon, a delegate at the 1907 Amsterdam congress of the Second International where, according to W.M.Haddow in his *My Seventy Years* (Gibson & Sons 1943), McGibbon "appeared in full Highland dress." Keir Hardie, Rosa Luxemboiurg, August Bebel were among those also present. George Yates was at the Paris Congress, see *All for the Cause*.

[2] he attributes the term to Roy Pascal p85]

[3] reprinted from *Democracy and the Labour Movement* (Lawrence & Wishart Ltd., 1955]

[4] Dunayevskaya's comment that "Marxism is a theory of liberation or it is nothing", cited in *All for the Cause*.